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S.B. No. 477 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE PUBLIC HEALTH OF RESIDENTS OF THE STATE

H.B. No. 5397 (RAISED) AN ACT DECLARING GUN VIOLENCE A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND ADVISORY COUNCIL ON GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION.

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, ranking members Hwang, Somers and Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Callie Gale Heilmann, I live in Bridgeport, CT, I am the President & Co-Director Bridgeport Generation Now - and a member of the Bridgeport Youth Gun Violence Prevention Task Force.

Thank you for raising bills to address the crisis of community gun violence in Connecticut, I am here to testify in support of SB 477 and HB 5397.

Founded in 2016, Bridgeport Generation Now is a grassroots, resident-led organization with over 300 members. At Gen Now, we build collective power by strengthening civic engagement in ourselves and our communities, using the tools of community organizing to dismantle systemic racism and systemic corruption, so that we can build the just, equitable, and livable city we know is possible!

Part of our work is issue research, our members take up the issues in Bridgeport we care about and research policy-driven solutions. In 2019, our members took up the issue of police violence and misconduct. As our Public Safety & Police Accountability committee researched best practices for strong police accountability, they understood that it must go hand in hand with new approaches to public safety. [From their report:](#)

“Research shows that violence spreads in clusters, remarkably in the same way epidemics spread... “mental trauma from exposure to violence has been scientifically shown to increase a person’s risk of adopting violent behavior themselves, meaning that violent behavior transmits and spreads based on exposure – just like an epidemic disease.” The greatest predictor of a person committing violence, is their exposure to violence, much like the transmission of a disease [see Figures A and B].”

It was from our work here that at the invitation of State Senator Moore, we joined the Bridgeport Youth Gun Violence Task Force in August 2019. The Task Force is composed of representatives from Bridgeport non-profits, clergy members, violence interruption programs, the Bridgeport Police Department, the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, and the hospitals. The task force met monthly to address the problem of escalating gun violence among youth of Bridgeport by discussing strategies, sharing current activities, and developing a vision for a violence free Bridgeport.

Although the Center For Disease Control and Prevention has long recognized gun violence as a public health issue¹, it has not been addressed using a coordinated public health strategy. In order to make progress in eliminating gun violence, it must be addressed (not just named) strategically with public support as a public health issue. Furthermore, the lack of focused research and funding specifically for the research results in a lack of evidence for a coordinated violence-reduction strategy in Connecticut.

In its report, the Bridgeport Gun Violence Task Force proposed the following recommendations:

1. Involve violence impacted communities in all aspects of the response
2. Establish Baseline Data
3. Invest in prevention in school-based, after-school mentoring and activities
4. Intervene in the community through evidence-based youth outreach and hospital-response programs.
5. Monitor and evaluate activities.

It is established that gun violence is a public health issue and one that will not be resolved with the development of a vaccine. Rather, it will take sustained and deliberate investment of public resources from city, state, and federal agencies. Those public resources must be coordinated strategically to ensure that stakeholders are involved in the strategic design and execution of the prevention, intervention, and evaluation of the intervention. Furthermore, public resources and funding require a transparent evaluation process to determine and improve best practices. Gun violence requires investment in proportion to other public health issues that has not been done to date and that investment demands an evaluation and review to determine impact of the strategy.

Sincerely,
Callie Gale Heilmann
Bridgeport Generation Now

¹ Violence Prevention Timeline, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *CDC Violence Prevention* [website], <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/timeline.html>, (accessed 9 February 2021)